

# Natural Beef: What are the Opportunities

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## FACT SHEET: Beef Choices

Beef Choices	The more than 800,000 beef producers throughout the United States offer a variety of beef choices to meet the changing lifestyles and nutritional needs of consumers. Beef producers have adapted their practices to provide consumers with the grain-fed, grass-finished, certified organic or "natural" beef they desire. While each kind of beef offers specific value to consumers, all beef is safe and nutritious.
Nutritional Value of Beef	<p>US beef is leaner than ever and is a premier, naturally nutrient-rich food, which helps consumers get more nutrients from their calories.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 29 cuts of beef (including 15 of the 20 most popular cuts) meet government guidelines for lean, like the tenderloin, sirloin and 95% lean ground beef.</li> <li>• Beef has eight times more vitamin B12, six times more zinc and two and a half times more iron than a skinless chicken breast.</li> </ul>
Beef Safety	All beef goes through a rigorous inspection process and is subject to strict government guidelines to ensure the highest level of safety. All cattle are inspected by a public health veterinarian before entering the packing plant and those with any signs of illness are not allowed into the food supply.
Grain-fed Beef	Grain-fed is the most widely produced type of beef by the more than 800,000 beef producers across the United States. Grain-fed cattle spend most of their lives eating grass in pastures, then move on to a feedlot where they are fed a high-energy, grain diet for four to six months.
Grass-finished Beef	<p>All beef is grass-fed, as cattle spend the majority of their lives in pastures eating grass. However, grass-finished beef comes from cattle that have been raised on pasture their entire lives.</p> <p>Grass-finished cattle may be raised according to the US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Organic Program (NOP) standards. However, grass-finished beef is not automatically considered certified organic as grass-finished cattle may be given Food and Drug Administration-approved antibiotics and/or growth promotants.</p>
Certified Organic Beef	<p>Beef must be from cattle that meet USDA's NOP livestock production requirements to be classified as certified organic. The Organic Foods Production Act, effective October 2002, sets the standards for all food labeled organic (<a href="http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/FactSheets/ProdHandE.html">http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/FactSheets/ProdHandE.html</a>). For beef, this means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cattle must be fed 100-percent organic feed, but may be given certain vitamin and mineral supplement.</li> <li>• Organically raised cattle may not be given hormones to promote growth or antibiotics for any reason. If an animal is sick, it cannot be denied treatment to ensure its health; however, animals treated with antibiotics must be taken out of the NOP.</li> <li>• All organically raised cattle must have access to pasture, but the majority of cattle in the US, regardless of how they are raised, meet this requirement.</li> <li>• Organic beef is certified through USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). Cattle must be raised using organic management from the last third of gestation.</li> </ul>
Natural Beef	<p>By definition, most beef is natural. According to USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), natural may be used on a label for meat if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The product does not contain any artificial flavor or flavoring, coloring ingredient, chemical preservative or any other artificial or synthetic ingredient; and</li> <li>• The product and its ingredients are not more than minimally processed (FSIS Directive 7220.1 Policy Memo 55 "Natural Claims").</li> </ul> <p>The government's definition of natural does not consider the manner in which animals are raised or what they are fed. Natural beef can be grain-fed, grass-finished or organic as long as it is minimally processed and contains no additives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some beef products may be marketed and labeled "natural" based on the specifications of the company that owns the brand, such as "raised without growth promotants and antibiotics."</li> </ul>

## Water Equivalents Table

1 cubic foot.....7.48 gallons.....62.4 lbs of water

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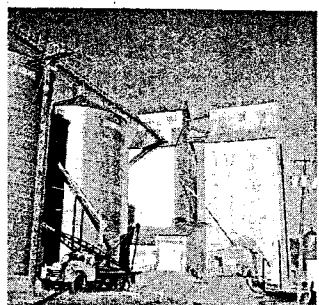
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## Natural beef: What are the opportunities?

By John Paterson, Extension Beef Specialist

Based on a survey conducted by county agents last fall, one of the top questions that producers had was about natural beef programs. The following may help to answer some of these questions.

Just exactly what is "natural" beef?

USDA defines natural beef as minimally processed containing no additives. Meat companies can expand the definition of natural to include specified production practices such as programs to restrict or ban the use of hormones (implants) or antibiotics (eg. Rumensin, LA200, etc.). (Maday, Drovers J, 1/16/06)

Why does the consumer choose natural or organic foods?

In one survey, 58 percent of respondents listed the environment, 57 percent said support for small or local farmers; 54 percent said health concerns, 42 percent said better quality and 32 percent believed that organic foods tasted better. (Smith, CSU).

Is natural beef a growth market?

Natural beef accounts for about 1 percent of beef sales. Even though the market is small, it is growing at a 20 percent annual rate. Organic food has sales in excess of \$10.4 billion and is the fastest growing segment of the food industry. It has been estimated that the natural and organic meat market will expand from \$2.3 billion in 2004 to \$5.5 billion in 2009 (Maday, 10/16/06).

What companies are selling natural beef?

Nolan Ryan Guaranteed Tender Meats, B3R Country Meats, Laura's Lean Beef, Harris Ranch and Maverick Ranch. In addition, National Beef recently launched a natural beef product and Tyson Foods also introduced two lines of natural beef, one in cooperation with Certified Angus Beef (Perkins, 11/2/06).

Does it cost more to produce natural or organic certified products?

Rodney Preston (emeritus professor from Texas Tech University) verified the fact that organic products are significantly more costly than conventional foods produced by modern technology, as shown in the following table. Much of the difference appears to be due to more expensive ration costs for organic food items.

Cost of Organic vs. Modern Technology Food Items

Food Item	Organic cost, \$	Modern technology cost, \$	Cost ratio, organic vs. modern tech.
1 doz. large eggs	2.99	0.99	3.0:1
0.5 gal. 2% milk	3.29	1.84	1.8:1
1 lb. cauliflower	2.99	1.99	1.5:1
1 lb. filet	41.50	15.00	2.8:1
1 lb. lean ground beef	6.00	3.50	1.7:1
1 bu. yellow corn	41.45	1.90	21.8:1

SOURCE: R.L. Preston, 2006. Plains Nutrition Council Conference.

Honeyman and others (2006) from Iowa State University compared conventional (implanted, grazed grass and then finished in feedlot; 185 days) production to a system in which steers grazed grass then standing corn and were finished in the feedlot on corn and hay (340 days). Overall gains for the implanted, conventionally raised steers were 3.3 lbs/day vs. 2.0 lbs/day on the grass-based system. Steers which grazed grass and corn required an additional 155 days to finish to desired carcass weights compared with the conventional steers.

What are the requirements for producing natural beef?

As one example, Clint Peck the Senior Editor of BEEF Magazine (April, 2004)

profiled Meyer Natural Angus Beef and outlined the following standards that producers must follow.

- Minimum 50% Red or Black Angus genetics.

- No added growth promotants, hormones or implants in the animal's lifetime.

- No antibiotics or ionophores administered in the animal's lifetime.

- No animal by-products in feed.

- Born and raised in the US

- Producers are encouraged to assembly loads of a minimum of 50,000 lbs.

- Weaned at least 45 days before leaving the ranch.

- Labeled use of vaccines is allowed.

- Raised under Humane Farm Animal Care guidelines.

- Allow visits by Meyer personnel to certify all standards are being met.

- At time of delivery, cattle are sound, in a merchantable condition and free of disease and lameness.

- Complete, accurate records must be kept.

- All vaccinations given subcutaneous or in the neck area with no more than 5 cc/site.

- Any animal treated with an antibiotic, or disqualified for any above reason, must be marked for removal from the natural program.

Product Safety: Conventional vs. Natural vs. Organic Foods

Gary Smith from Colorado State University (Maday, Drovers Journal, 10/16/06) said the availability of beef with specific "credence attributes," or what he referred to as "designer beef," is positive for the industry and consumers. There are some consumer who simply would not eat beef if all they could get was commodity product from the conventional production system. If they want "natural," "organic" or "grass-fed" beef, and are willing to pay for it, that demand creates profit opportunities for producers and processors.

A key issue, Smith says, is the way in which natural or organic products are marketed to the public. Claims such as "chemical-free" or "hormone-free" simply are false since all foods are comprised of chemicals and animals produce hormones naturally. Unsubstantiated claims that a product is healthier or safer than conventional beef also are misleading and harmful to the industry. Designer beef offers consumers a choice, but he says, "Don't make claims that are not supported by science." Britt Hicks from Oklahoma State University, (September 2006) summarized a report from the American Council on Science and Health (2003) which concluded that natural and organic produced beef products did not differ from conventionally raised beef in terms of nutrition or safety.

Bottom line: If you are selling "natural-certified" feeder calves, a premium is required.

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Including Rudolph, how many reindeer does Santa have? Ten: Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner, Blitzen, Rudolph and Olive. Olive? Yes, Olive the Other Reindeer.

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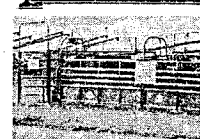
What cruises down the riverbed at 60 mph? A motorbike with two side cars.

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What did Godzilla say after eating a four-cylinder Datsun? "Gosh, I could have had a V-8!"

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